

Investigation into responsive repairs: Appointments, Communication Process and Customer Journey



Report February 2018



Rotherham Federation

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1. Background

Rotherham Federation Tenant Scrutiny was formed in April 2016. Tenant Scrutiny provides an opportunity to build an effective partnership between Rotherham Council's tenants and their landlord in the spirit of co-regulation, resulting in a jointwin for all. This process is used to challenge landlords' services and standards with the aim of improving performance, value for money and tenant satisfaction.

This is the second report of the Rotherham Federation Tenant Scrutiny panel resulting from an investigation into responsive repairs and the customer journey.

Choice of topic

The STAR survey 2017¹ found that 'repairs and maintenance' remained the biggest priority for Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) tenants, with it being *a priority for 74% of respondents* (the second most important priority scored only 50%).

The STAR Survey results are based on 4,500 questionnaires that are posted out to randomly selected tenants. In 2017, 28% (1,254) of surveys were completed and returned.

77% of people responding to the STAR survey reported that they were satisfied with repairs and maintenance services. Benchmarking against similar housing providers found that this was a median result; providers in the upper quartile reached 82% satisfaction 2 .

People satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service were most pleased about being able to make an appointment, being told when workers would call, and the quality of work (86 - 90% satisfaction). The time taken before the appointment and getting the repair right first time showed lower satisfaction scores (82-84%).

16% of STAR survey respondents expressed dissatisfaction with repairs and maintenance. Least satisfied were tenants living in Wentworth South and tenants under the age of 44 years.

Complaints received about contracts and repairs in 2016/17 amounted to 53% of all housing complaints (representing 0.1% of all repairs), an increase from 38% in the previous year.

The RMBC repairs service

Over the years the number of responsive non-gas repairs has reduced from 53325 in 11/12 to 50279 in 16/17, mainly through planned works being used in a more preventative way. This represents approximately 68% of RMBC homes. A further 19,000 gas safety visits are completed each year.

The appointment priorities for responsive repairs visits changed in recent years from four categories (same day, three day, five day and nine day) to just two categories (four hours and 28 days). This has achieved to reduced costs for RMBC.

Two contractors are currently employed to deliver the responsive repairs service; Fortem and Mears. The specification review of the repairs contracts is currently underway with new contracts to be awarded in April 2020.

2. The panel

The panel was made up of representatives of various Tenant and Resident Associations across Rotherham:

- David Ramsden (Chair)
- Ann Hitchens
- Lilian Shears
- Mary Jacques
- Pat Cahill
- Stuart Mayo
- Winnie Billups

Officer support was provided by:

Asim Munir, RMBC Tenant Involvement Coordinator Louise Robinson, RMBC Performance and Data Analyst Steve Ruffle, Chief Executive Officer, RotherFed Rebecca Morrison project solutions

3. Terms of reference

Aim: To investigate the responsive repairs service offered by RMBC including consideration of appointment systems, the communication process and the customer journey.

Objectives:

- To consider the processing of repairs requests, in particular the way in which tenant needs are assessed and appointments are made
- To establish how vulnerable people are identified and supported throughout the repairs process
- To consider if communication between RMBC, contractors and tenants is working well in regard to responsive repairs
- To ascertain whether the RMBC repairs service is meeting tenant expectations for the customer journey
- To investigate how complaints, concerns and customer feedback are used to improve housing repairs services

Scope:

It was agreed that the panel would only investigate repairs that were responsive and not planned maintenance nor gas safety visits.

4. Methodology

The panel's investigation took place between June 2017 and February 2018. The investigation consisted of:

4.1 Meetings

The panel interviewed representatives of Rotherham MBC and the repairs contractors; Fortem and Mears. Most of the meetings focussed on questions around the way in which:

- Repairs are reported and processed
- ☑ Vulnerable tenants are identified and supported
- Appointments are made for all repairs visits
- Emergency repairs are handled differently

- ☑ Customer feedback is requested and responded to
- Contracts are managed and specifications agreed for visits, quality and customer care
- ☑ Complaints are received, processed and used to improve the service.

Other panel meetings focussed on considering documents and information from Rotherham Council and other housing providers and collating information received from tenants.

4.2 Surveys

Mystery shopping

The questionnaire that was being used regularly by the RMBC mystery shopping to ask about people's experiences of repairs was considered by the panel. A recent series of Mystery shopping *Reality Checks'* had taken place in June 2017. The questions were adapted slightly for use in this investigation.

Fifteen people commented on their recent repairs through the mystery shopping exercise.

Tenant Survey

Using the adapted mystery shopping questionnaire, a survey was circulated to tenants using a Google online form. This form was also used at the Rotherham Federation tenant conference in July 2017.

Questions were focussed on customer satisfaction with:

- ? Reporting of repairs
- ? Suitability of the appointment and whether it was kept
- ? The repair being completed first time
- ? Quality of the repair
- ? Their opportunity to give feedback

48 responses were received to the survey, but 13 people had not ordered a repair recently. These were excluded from the analysis of results.

A full breakdown of results can be found in Appendix A.

Customer Journey mapping

People attending the Rotherham Federation Open meeting in November 2017 were asked to comment on their recent repairs' experiences. Exercises were planned to establish:

How long tenants thought that it should take to attend to different types of repair

- What they considered to be emergency repairs
- What was most important to them about the repairs service e.g. time taken, quality
- The stages where things have gone wrong with their repairs in the past
- If they knew how to complain about a repair if necessary

25 tenants took part in the workshop.

Attendees were also asked to try out and comment on the new online form for reporting repairs.

A full breakdown of responses can be found in Appendix B.

4.3 Benchmarking

An exercise took place to compare Rotherham MBC to other housing providers that were included in the same Housemark benchmark group plus other similar providers. These were:

- Severnside
- ♦ Mansfield
- 🏷 St Leger
- ⅍ Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing
- A1 housing (Bassetlaw)
- Sity of Lincoln
- 🏷 Berneslai

A search of their websites was carried out and follow-up emails were sent to find out how they compared to RMBC as regards number of repairs, timescales, appointments available, repairs completed first time and tenant satisfaction.

5. Thank yous

Panel members are grateful for the contributions made to their investigation by officers of the Council, their contractors and other housing providers. In particular:

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Alison Barker Andrew Leigh Andy Lumb John Perry Lauren Bickerstaff Louise Robinson Matt Lowe Fortem Roy O'Connor

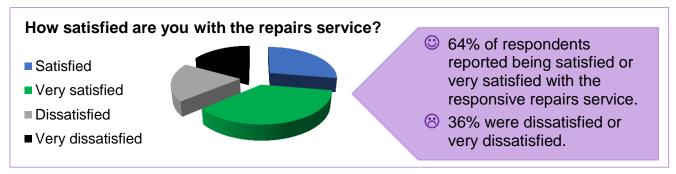
Mears Diane Keay

All the tenants who took part in the survey, mystery shopping and customer journey exercises.

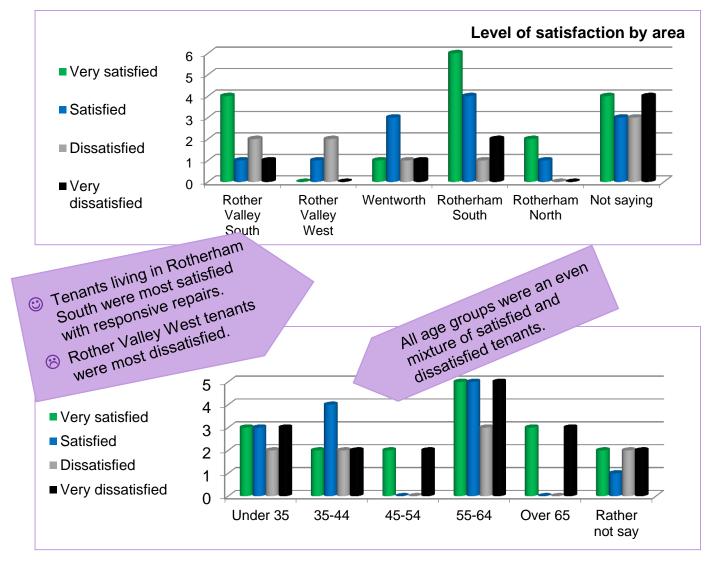
6. Summary of Evidence

6.1 Satisfaction with the repairs service

From the first tenant survey for repairs the panel considered the results from the 35 people who said that they had reported housing repairs within the last twelve months:



This level of satisfaction compares unfavourably to the level found in the STAR survey (77%) and through internal monitoring (99.53%).



At the customer journey workshop, tenants were asked at what point their repairs journey had failed:

Stage	Journey failed at this stage for how many tenants (maximum 25)?
Reporting the repair	7 (28%)
Getting the appointment I wanted	7 (28%)
Waiting for the appointment	5 (20%)
Ringing to find out if my appointment is still on	2 (8%)
Operative not turning up at the appointment	5 (20%)
Rearranging the appointment	2 (8%)
Time taken for operative to complete the repair	4 (16%)
Operative having to come back again	7 (28%)
Repair not working having to report again	4 (16%)

The worst parts of the journey were highlighted as **reporting the repair, getting an appointment and an operative having to come back**.

They were also asked which part of the journey was most important to them:

What matters most?	Average Score (where 1 is most important and 10 is the least)
Easy to report	1.9
Time taken to come and do the repair	4.2
Repair completed first time	3.7
Good quality repair	3.0
Arrived at agreed time	3.3
Pleasant Staff	5.1

Most important to tenants reporting a repair is that it **is easy to report**, **it is a good quality repair and that operatives arrive at the agreed time**.

PANEL VIEWS:

- ➢ From anecdotal evidence the panel agreed that the dissatisfaction level of 36% with repairs was of concern.
- The panel was surprised by the large discrepancy in the levels of satisfaction found in the tenant survey compared to the STAR survey and more so to the internal monitoring. It was not clear whether people were more honest when asked for their views by their peers or when asked anonymously.

It was encouraging to find that the things most important to people during the customer journey workshop (ease of reporting repairs, quality of repair and arriving at the agreed time) were factors that demonstrated high levels of satisfaction in the STAR survey.

6.2 Reporting repairs S From the tenant survey we found that 80% repairs were reported by telephone. 9% repairs were reported by email Other ways of reporting included through gas servicing and smoke checks.

Reporting by phone

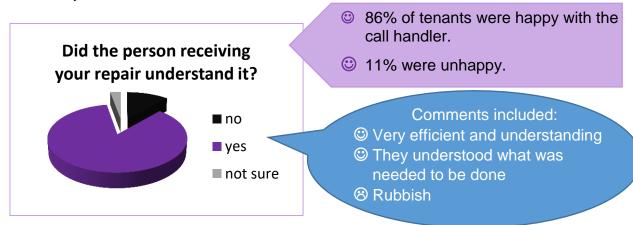
The call handlers receiving repairs are generic; serving four different Council services. Training for customer service representatives generally takes between one and four weeks, followed by a period of shadowing experienced colleagues.

Supervisors listen to recorded calls every couple of months to monitor quality and this information is used at appraisal meetings (held every six months). Department meetings also take place with all staff every four-five months when quality can be raised and issues discussed as a team.

Any complaints received about the customer service teams are highlighted as specific team issues but trends are not always shared. Most issues raised by tenants relate more to the time it is going to take to attend to the repair.

Customer services staff estimated that telephone repairs are usually answered within two-five minutes. This was tested by panel members and was found to be between one and eight minutes. The average waiting time was approximately two minutes.

There is a set script for each type of repair, but specific notes can be put on a job if necessary.



Out of hours telephone service

The out of hours service operates every day from 8pm to 8am and at weekends and is operated by a team of eight people. The same telephone number is used for this service as daytime calls, which makes it more accessible for tenants. If a non-emergency call comes through to this line the tenant is asked to call again during office hours, or a message can sometimes be taken.

Reporting by email

9% of the people responding to the tenant survey had reported their repair via email.

Repairs emails are received in a central inbox and are responded to in between calls, as and when call handlers become available. Many of the emails are responded to by the out of hours team during the evening. There is a target of a one day response to repairs emails.

Survey respondents expressed some concerns about the email service for repairs:

- ☑ Check the email account more
- \square Offer a choice of appointments to email repairs.
- ☑ The email account needs to be checked more than once a day.
- ☑ When you email; someone should read the email and judge the urgency rather than just say two weeks because you emailed
- ☑ You can't get an appointment straight away.

Reporting online

During the course of the investigation an online form was introduced by RMBC for the reporting of repairs.

This form was tested out with some of the tenants that attended the Rotherham Federation open meeting in November 2017.

Some of the observations were:

☑ Most people searching for the online form found it easily.

- A lot of the text was too small to read and the grey colour was also poor.
- ? Users were unsure why they had to specify whether they were male or female/ what their ethnicity was when this information is already available on the Council's database.
- The repair description box was too open. There was a worry that this may lead to the wrong trade/ wrong tools and materials at the repair and wasted trips.
- ? It would be easier to use with a webchat facility.

PANEL VIEWS:

- The panel was happy that there was a good mix of reporting channels for repairs, particularly as 'ease of reporting' was the most important feature of the repairs journey from the workshop.
- ➢ The average time of two minutes to answer a call was felt to be acceptable although the panel would not like to see many callers having to wait eight minutes to be answered.
- \blacktriangleright The panel was impressed by the repairs service that operates out of hours.
- It was clear that people had noticed that email repairs were not being picked up very quickly and that they would be better using the telephone (most likely at more expense to RMBC).
- There was also concern about the online form being too vague which could lead to a lot of wrong trades being sent to repairs jobs and an increase in repairs not being right first time. It was also felt that the form wasn't 'user-friendly'.
- ➢ The panel agreed that a webchat facility, instructional video and/or frequently asked questions section would be useful to guide people in the use of the online form.

Recommendations

- Ensure that repairs received by email are checked more regularly than once a day and receive the same level of service as those received by phone.
- > Make improvements to the online reporting tool for repairs, in particular:
 - Improving the appearance and usability of the form
 - o Including more detailed questions about the repair required
 - o Offering the same four options on appointments
 - Exploring the use of webchat/ an instruction video/ Frequently Asked Questions to support people using the online reporting tool.

6.3 Appointments

Responsive repairs appointments are set by the contractors and forwarded to the appointment planners in the RMBC call centre. There are four appointment times that are available for repairs:

- All day
- 🕙 8:00 am 12:30 pm
- (1) 9:30 am 3:00 pm, or
- 12:00 pm 5:45 pm

Most other housing providers offered similar times for appointments including morning, afternoon and appointments avoiding the school run. Rotherham had the latest finish time for repairs' visits which is useful for tenants, but did not provide routine Saturday morning appointments as some providers did.

Reporting by telephone - Call handlers will refer to the contractor calendars and find the best appointment available for the tenant. This is agreed during the phone conversation where possible.

Reporting by email - The appointment is not made straight away leading to a delay in arranging the visit. This can cause some issues for people who are not available all day.

Reporting online - Only two appointment times are offered; am or pm.

People attending the open meeting commented: 'the online form doesn't specify start and finish times for appointments. Nor does it offer an option that avoids the 'school run'.

In some circumstances suitable appointments are not available and the contractors are contacted to arrange the appointment for themselves. It was not clear whether appointments made directly by contractors would be recorded on the RMBC system.

Weekend work is planned by contractors if there is a backlog on repairs.

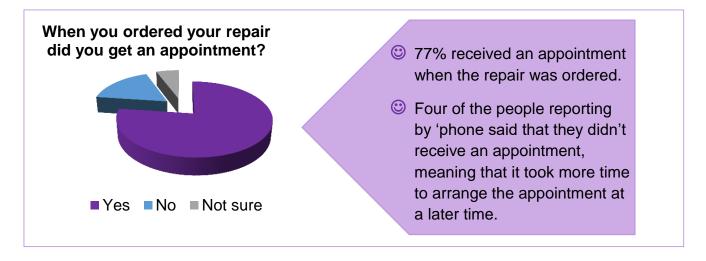
Reminders

A text reminder is sent out to the tenant automatically by contractors confirming the appointment. A reminder is sent again on the day before and the day of the appointment. However it was not clear if the text refers to an original appointment even if the date and time has been changed by the tenant.

For tenants without mobile phones, the operative will 'phone when they are on their way to the property. One issue that was raised by contractors was that the repairs system does not have up to date telephone numbers for the tenant in all cases.

If a tenant is not at home when the operative arrives they leave a card stating the time that they came. The tenant then has to go back through the call centre to rearrange the appointment.

From the Mystery Shopping exercise, all but one tenant said that they had received an appointment when reporting their repair.



The results of the tenant survey were not quite as positive:

PANEL VIEWS:

- ➢ It was pleasing that later finish times for repairs appointments were offered by RMBC as compared with other providers.
- It was felt that Saturday morning appointments as a routine would be an improvement to the service if possible.
- The panel was concerned that latest contact numbers were not always on file for repairs visits, leading to reminders not being sent and checks that the tenant was still available being less likely to occur.
- There was some disappointment that people reporting repairs via email or the online form were not being offered the same appointment choices as customers reporting over the 'phone.

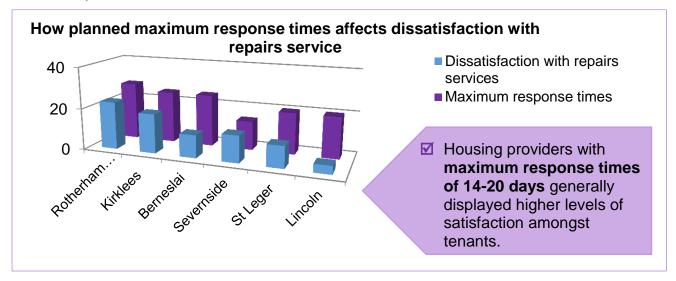
Recommendation

Modify the repairs reporting tools to make it obligatory to take the tenant's current contact details. Link this to the general database of tenant information.

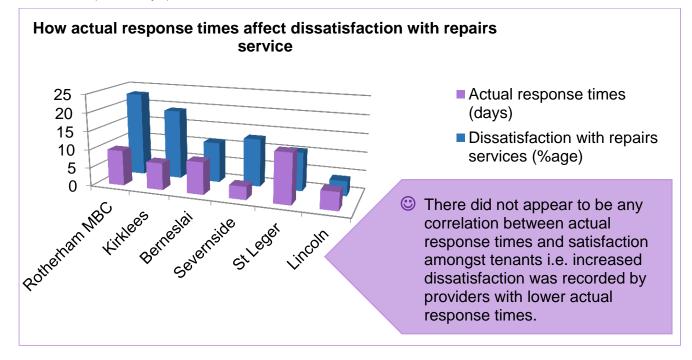
6.4 Response times

Target times for responsive repairs (other than gas repairs) have changed over the past few years from offering six priority levels to two. The two current levels are four hours or 28 days.

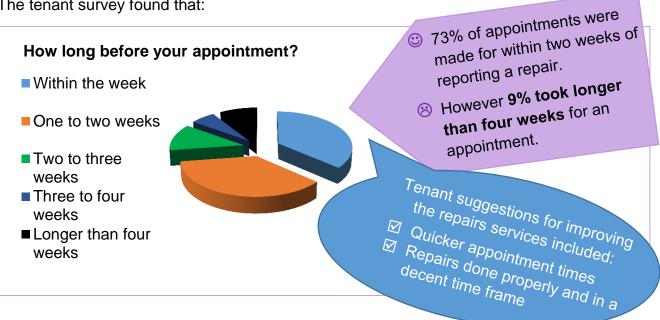
Satisfaction with response times has consistently been one of the worst performance results for RMBC in the STAR survey. From the benchmarking exercise with other housing providers, Rotherham MBC had the longest timescale for planned completion of routine repairs with 28 days, followed closely by Kirklees and Berneslai with 25 days:



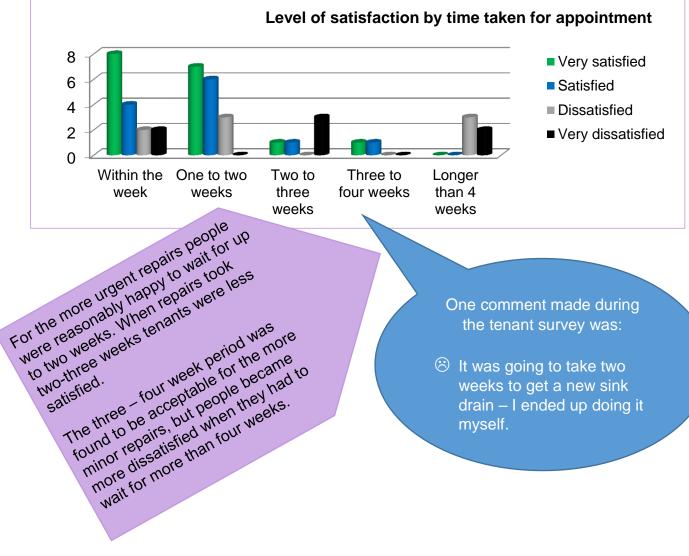
As regards the average actual time to complete the repairs, Rotherham were in the median quartile with 9.62 days. Best performers were Severnside (3.5 days) and City of Lincoln (4.85 days):



The tenant survey found that:



The tenant survey also looked at satisfaction levels:



During the repairs journey exercises, 25 participants were asked how long they thought was reasonable for completion of the following repairs:

	Acceptable response time					
Repair	Four	24	10	28	Comments	
	hours	hours	days	days		
Repairing broken tap	1	3	6	15	 For vulnerable tenants this should be a four-hour response. Would tenants be able to turn their stopcock off if it was a severe leak? 	
Replacing an upstairs smashed window	1	7	14	3	OK to wait as long as there is no danger from broken glass and if it is secure.	
Repairing a leaking roof	3	9	13	0	Ideally someone should check the severity of leak within 24 hours	
Unblocking a toilet (if you only have one in your home)	23	2	0	0		
Unblocking a toilet (if you have two in your home)	3	10	12	0	 Sooner if this is a vulnerable tenant who is unable to access the other toilet. May be a health hazard to leave a toilet blocked for more than a few days. 	
Replacing a kitchen cupboard door	0	0	0	25		
Repairing an internal door that won't close	0	0	3	22	Unless it is a fire door in which case it should be 24 hours	
Restoring electricity supply that has completely gone off	25	0	0	0		

From the housing complaints received by RMBC in 16/17; 22% were due to a delayed repair.

PANEL VIEWS:

- Panel members were not surprised that tenants of other housing providers with shorter repairs response targets are more satisfied than RMBC tenants.
- This is despite RMBC performing better in actual response times. It appears that perception of how long a repair is going to take is more important than the actual time taken as regards satisfaction with the repairs service.
- ➢ The panel were satisfied that some people are happy to wait for three to four weeks for some minor repairs, but were concerned that so many tenants said that their repairs had not been completed within the four week maximum limit.
- ➢ The survey and customer journey workshop found that many people thought that there should be more options than 4 hours or 28 days.

Recommendation

Consider reinstating another level of appointment priority to reassure people that important repairs will not take 28 days to complete.

Emergency repairs

If a repair is an emergency, the work will be ordered immediately to be assessed for completion within four hours. The telephone number used for reporting emergency repairs is the same as the general repairs number.

If there is a suspected gas leak, customers are advised to telephone the national grid. RMBC will also contact the national grid. For other gas repairs, contractors are called out within four hours, 24 hours or as a routine visit (28 days) depending on the severity of the issue.

Other than gas repairs, the RMBC website states that an 'emergency' is:

- ♦ A flood
- Anything that is a risk to your health and safety or to the property
- ✤ Complete loss of power
- ✤ Complete loss of heating and hot water
- A minor leak from a domestic pipe, if the leak is causing damage to the property or your belongings
- Blocked toilet, where there is no other working toilet in the property
- ✤ Broken downstairs window

At the customer repairs journey event, participants were asked whether there were other repairs that they thought should be classed as an emergency. Suggestions in order of priority included:

- ☑ Broken external door (if there is a security issue)
- ☑ All repairs where there are vulnerable tenants or very young children.
- ☑ Damaged electrical sockets
- ☑ Where the property is left without water
- ☑ Infestations
- ☑ Following any fire damage

PANEL VIEWS:

- The panel felt that the definition of emergency i.e. 'Anything that is a risk to your health and safety or to the property' was too vague and open to misinterpretation. The list of repairs descriptions was far more helpful.
- ➢ It was agreed that consideration should be given to extending the list to include the repairs suggested at the customer journey workshop.
- There was some confusion over why the same telephone number is used for emergency repairs as for general repairs. To allow for prioritisation it was felt that a separate number may help.

Recommendation

Provide further guidance on the definition of 'emergency repairs' to reduce confusion amongst tenants.

Vulnerabilities

The Panel wanted to consider the repairs journey from the viewpoint of vulnerable tenants; in particular how vulnerabilities are flagged up on the repairs system and the additional support that is received.

Customer service colleagues reported that there are alerts already on some tenant records and that call handlers will usually ask about vulnerabilities during calls, but not on every occasion. Any vulnerabilities identified when taking repairs calls should also be forwarded to the team responsible for updating the tenant database.

Tenancy verification visits also take place with tenants on a four yearly rotation. These are also used for the identification of new vulnerabilities since last contact.

Safeguarding training is in place for all operatives working for contractors, to skill them to be able to identify issues. All issues are flagged up through contract managers. This can link to alerting social services teams or the fire service as necessary.

If contract managers become aware that an operative has failed to follow the safeguarding reporting procedure then a disciplinary may take place.

Test

The system of recording vulnerabilities was tested out using the recent repairs report of a tenant involved in this investigation (with their consent). It was found that their vulnerability had not been added to the database even though it had been flagged as part of a repairs request.

PANEL VIEWS:

- The panel were pleased with the training and systems that are already used to log vulnerabilities but were concerned that some records were not being updated as required.
- It was thought that some extra work was needed to ensure the logging of vulnerabilities, perhaps as supervisory exercises.

Recommendation

Monitor the way in which details of vulnerable tenants are recorded, updated and used by all staff including customer services operatives and contractors.

6.5 The repairs visit

Appointments kept

The benchmarking information showed that Rotherham MBC achieve a high percentage of repairs' appointments being kept (**99.54%**) placing them in the upper quartile as compared to other housing providers.

From the mystery shopping exercise all but one person said that the operative had arrived at the right time.



PANEL VIEWS:

- It was encouraging to find that most repairs appointments were taking place as planned across RMBC, particularly as this was identified as the third most important feature of the repairs service at the customer journey workshop.
- ➢ However the comments received from the 14% of tenants who had not received the right appointment were disappointing.

Right First time

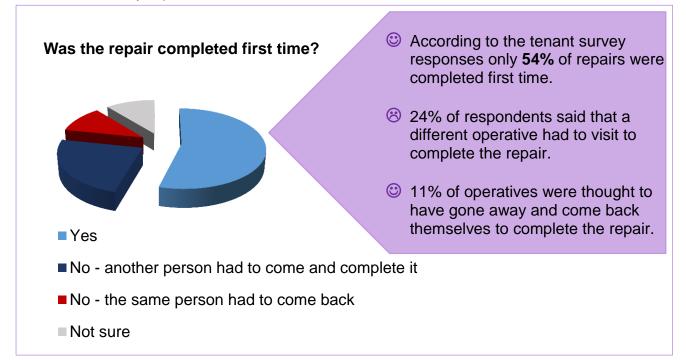
Rotherham compared well to other housing providers in the benchmarking exercise reporting that **93.98%** of repairs were completed first time. This places them in the median upper quartile for the Housemark benchmarking group (The best result for other housing providers was A1 Housing with 99.83% repairs completed first time; however this provider is a third the size of Rotherham MBC).

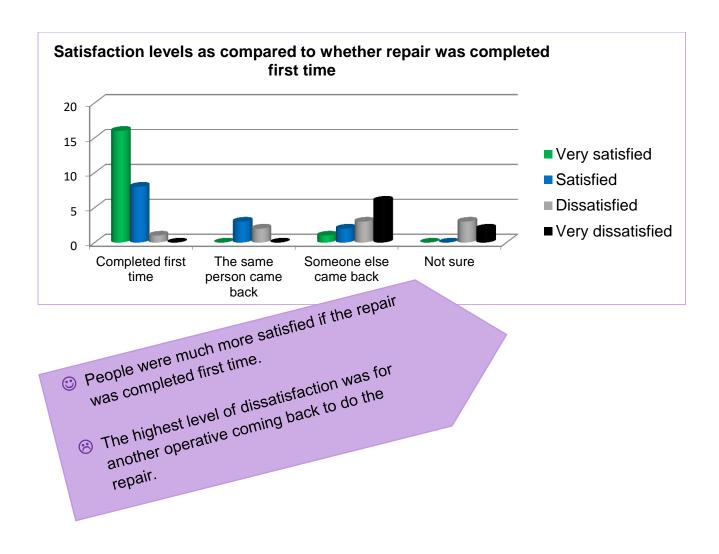
Despite achieving a good result in the benchmarking exercise, 'right first time' remained one of the lowest benchmarking scores for Rotherham MBC (as in previous years).

The STAR survey 2017 reports that the key three drivers of satisfaction with repairs in Rotherham MBC are:

- ☑ Contractors doing the job expected
- ☑ Overall quality of work
- ☑ Repair being done right first time.

The tenant survey reported:





PANEL VIEWS:

- ➢ The panel were concerned at the large discrepancy between benchmarking data and the 'right first time' levels reported by tenants.
- ➢ It was clear to the panel that improving the number of repairs completed first time could make a substantial improvement to tenant satisfaction.

Recommendation

Explore the use of other means for assessing 'right first time' through the use of visit data rather than relying on customer satisfaction surveys.

6.6 Contract Management

There are two RMBC repairs and maintenance contract managers; one for each contractor. Formal meetings take place with contractors on a regular basis:

- Monthly progress meetings look at all services delivered in the contracts, spend, forecast and performance.
- Bi-monthly triangulation meetings look at budgets, high level performance and if anything is going wrong.
- Regular core meetings.

The RMBC contract managers are also based at the contractors' location for one day each week, which helps with understanding contractor issues and monitoring of the contract.

Performance information is collated and reported through from the repairs and maintenance contractors on a regular basis. The information received is subsequently scrutinised and validated by members of the Performance and Quality Team through a series of telephone calls to customers (approximately 60 calls per month).

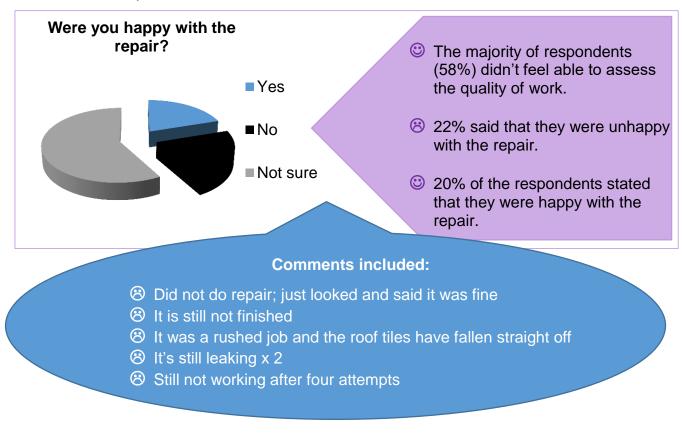
The specification review of the repairs and maintenance contracts is currently underway in preparation for new contracts being awarded in April 2020.

Quality of work

A good quality repair was found to be the second most important priority for customer journey participants. It was also the second most likely reason for a housing repairs complaint in 16/17 (13%).

The mystery shopping exercise found that 87% people were satisfied with their repair. The other two people reported *that 'the workmanship was shoddy and not up to standard'* and that '*one operative was intending to use unacceptable materials.*'

The tenant survey found:



PANEL VIEWS:

- ➢ The panel was satisfied on the whole with the level of contract monitoring that takes place.
- ➢ Panel members however were concerned by some of the comments received from the tenants survey as regards quality of repairs.
- ➢ As most tenants felt that they were unable to assess the quality of work completed it was discussed whether there could be other quality checks in place.

Recommendation

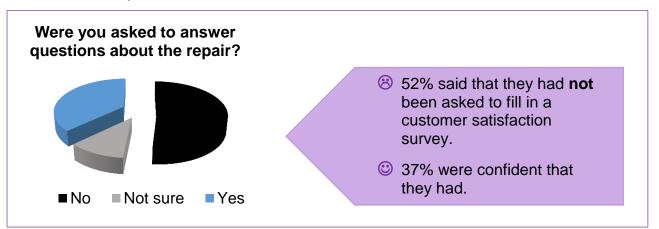
Carry out a monitoring exercise on the type/ number of repeat visits being made to the previously completed repairs with a view to assessing the quality of repairs made.

6.7 Customer satisfaction

After most repairs to RMBC homes, the tenants are asked to complete a short survey on a PDA device held by the operative. The contractor target for completion of these surveys is high at 65% of repairs completed. It was noted that there can be difficulties in receiving this information following external works or repairs made in communal areas. All customer satisfaction information is sent to RMBC contract managers along with key performance indicator statistics.

Other checks on customer satisfaction are made through mystery shopping teams operated by both RMBC and the contractors themselves. The most recent results from RMBC mystery shopping exercise found that 73% had completed a survey, 20% couldn't remember and 7% said that they definitely hadn't filled in a survey.

RMBC and contractors have previously tried to receive customer satisfaction information through the use of paper surveys but these have resulted in a low return rate (below 20%).



The tenant survey found:

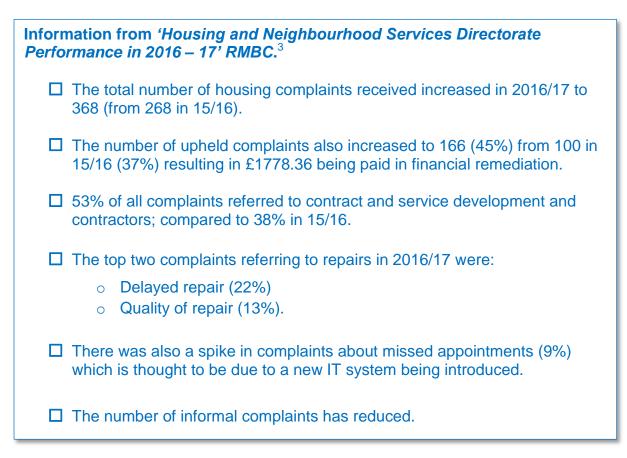
PANEL VIEWS:

- ➢ There was some concern over the accuracy of PDA information, in particular through people feeling that they can't answer honestly when the operative is present. Also there was a suggestion that operatives may be able to fill the survey in for themselves.
- Other options for measuring customer satisfaction were discussed but it was evident that most methods had some pitfalls. Panel members thought that text surveys (similar to those used by the NHS) were easy for people to use.

Recommendation

Use multiple ways of receiving customer feedback on the repairs service instead of relying on PDAs, including the use of a text messaging service.

6.8 Complaints



Process

Complaints Team

The majority of complaints concerning repairs are received by the complaints team via the 'phone, email or RMBC website. The team decide whether each referral is a request, a comment or a complaint. Unless the caller specifically states that they wish to complain, each issue is recorded as a request/comment. The prime issue only is recorded, whereas many customers may complain about more than one issue at a time. An acknowledgement is sent to the tenant within three working days of receiving a complaint/request.

Stage 1 procedure - The request is then allocated to the appropriate officer/manager and a further acknowledgement letter is sent out within 10 workings day which should hopefully address all the points the tenant has raised.

Stage 2 - If the response is not acceptable to the tenant, the complaint may be escalated to the Complaints Team manager who has 25 days to investigate and respond. (3.5% of complaints in 16/17 were escalated to stage two).

Housing Ombudsman - After a period of 8 weeks a complaint can be referred to the Housing Ombudsman (7 or 8 complaints per year are elevated to this level).

Complaints made directly to contractors

Some complaints are made directly to the contractor, particularly if operatives are late or untidy. Supervisors will visit most customers to check the quality of the work if a complaint is made. It was reported that some tenants prefer to communicate via email, phone or letter than be visited. Operatives are asked to sign and confirm each issue raised and team discussions take place to share learning.

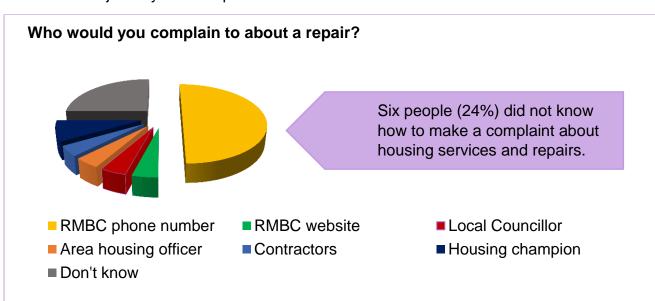
If the tenant is still dissatisfied following investigation they are asked if they would wish to make a formal complaint and this is then forwarded to RMBC complaints team.

Usually two/three complaints are received each month by both contractors, but there was a dramatic increase to this figure following the changes that were made to repairs priorities and response times by RMBC.

Councillor/MP complaints

Due to changes in the corporate system in September 2016, the complaints team ceased to receive complaints about housing repairs which may have been forwarded from Councillors and MPs. A record of these complaints is kept separately from the central complaints database.

For April to September 2016 there were 125 housing complaints/enquiries received by Councillors and MPs and 33% of these related to Contract and Service Development.



The customer journey workshop found:

PANEL VIEWS:

- The panel felt that improvements could be made to the collection of complaints data which in turn could lead to better informed improvement of services. In particular secondary issues and informal issues should also be collated.
- ➢ Panel members would also like to see informal and formal complaints from contractors and from Councillors to be collated into the same record.
- ➢ The panel was concerned that nearly a quarter of people taking part in the customer journey exercise did not know how to make a complaint.

Suggestions

Make improvements to the logging of repairs complaints to:

- Amalgamate the complaints received through all channels including MPs and Councillors
- Log secondary issues reported by complainants
- Include informal complaints.

Review the guidance for tenants on how to make a complaint, including making improvements to the website and the handbook.

7. Recommendations (in order of priority)

Priority ranking	Recommendation	Page Number
A1	Monitor the way in which details of vulnerable tenants are recorded, updated and used by all staff including customer services operatives and contractors.	20
A2	Modify the repairs reporting tools to make it obligatory to take the tenant's current contact details. Link this to the general database of tenant information.	14
B1	 Make improvements to the online reporting tool for repairs, in particular: Improving the appearance and usability of the form Including more detailed questions about the repair required Offering the same four options on appointments Exploring the use of webchat/ an instruction video/ Frequently Asked Questions to support people using the online reporting tool. 	12
B2	Ensure that repairs received by email are checked more regularly than once a day and receive the same level of service as those received by phone.	12
С	C Consider reinstating another level of appointment to priority to reassure people that important repairs will not take 28 days to complete.	
D	Provide further guidance on the definition of <i>'emergency repairs'</i> to reduce confusion amongst tenants.	19
E	Carry out a monitoring exercise on the type/ number of repeat visits being made to the previously completed repairs with a view to assessing the quality of repairs made.	24

F Use multiple ways of receiving customer feedback on the repairs service instead of relying on PDAs, including the use of a text messaging service.		25
G	Explore the use of other means for assessing 'right first time' through the use of visit data rather than relying on customer satisfaction surveys.	22

Suggestions				
1.	 Make improvements to the logging of repairs complaints to: i. Amalgamate the complaints received through all channels including MPs and Councillors ii. Log secondary issues reported by complainants iii. Include informal complaints. 			
2.	Review the guidance for tenants on how to make a complaint, including making improvements to the website and the handbook.			

8. References

- 1. 'STAR survey Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2017 Prepared for: Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council' BMG Research, 2017
- 2. 'HouseMark Core Benchmarking Report 2015/16 Rotherham MBC' HouseMark, October 2016
- 3. 'Housing and Neighbourhood Services Directorate Performance in 2016 17' RMBC 2017.

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